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1847

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

SABBATH SCHOOLS AND CITIZENS

OF

GEORGETOWN, D. C.,

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION,

Held in

BOYCE'S GROVE, ON MONDAY, JULY 5TH, 1847,

BY

WALTER S. COX, ESQ.

Published by request.

WASHINGTON:

PRINTED BY WM. Q. FORCE.

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This joyful anniversary has again assembled us together to exchange felicitations and to mingle our orisons to the Giver of those blessings of which the occasion is a remembrancer. We have come up in solemn pageant to the great temple of nature—our incense, the spontaneous emotion of gratitude—our choir music, the symphonies of nature's hundred tongues. We have come to linger upon names redolent of merit, and to accord our humble tribute to men who grace the proudest gallery of portraits that old Time has gathered to his treasures. We have come to rekindle that holy flame which, smouldering amid the selfish cares of every day life, leaps forth at the magic sound "our country," while discordant hearts are spelled to harmony, and, dropping the petty animosities of yesterday, men wear the holiday garb of patriotism and undistinguishing charity.

Oh! on this day of jubilee, what an electric current circles through the great heart of our country, stirring up the warm blood of youth, quickening the calmer pulse of age, deepening the flush on beauty's cheek and manhood's brow, and animating even the pulseless worshippers of mammon, with a thrilling sense of the sweets of liberty.

With the old, the burial places of memory yield up their dead, and as the panorama of events goes in review before them, they join with swelling hearts in the glad acclaim arising from a thousand vallies where once solitude held unbroken sabbath.

The young read in the times auspices of a glorious to-come, while in fancy they sketch their own paths bordered with flowers, arched with dreams, and peopled with bright, beckoning forms.

And on a day like this, it becomes us, one and all, to escape from the narrow present, and as well to study the stern and bright realities of the past, as to look with interest for the pregnant issues of the future. We turn from the one, full of glory and encouragement, to find the other rich in promise of prosperity. We linger in the flood from sunset's golden urns, and turn to hail a dawn red with scintillant harbingers of rising glories.

Especially does it behoove us to contemplate aright the great event of American Independence; an event which brought to light a new de-

monstration of political truth; was part of a great system in the economy of the moral world; was a new stage in the progressive destiny of the race; and formed one dependent and sustaining link in the golden chain of phenomena, which shall connect, on the one hand, creation—on the other, what the far off future shall disclose—man in his highest dignity and development, emancipated from all thrall, “dim miniature of greatness absolute.”

The power of society has been guided by three great principles: Honor, Knowledge, and Union. Unfortunately, unlike the chemical equivalents in the physical world, they have no definite natural proportion of combination. And, indeed, in the ancient world, such combination was scarce known, but either the principle of union absorbed the greatest proportion of power, while the others remained comparatively inoperative, or these in turn arrogated an undue share, and without the other were imbecile and inefficient.

The great object of modern contention has been, to give prominence to the principle of honor, which has its home with the people; to enlighten it with the knowledge of the few; and to give it efficiency with the principle of union, represented in the oneness of the governing power.

This has been the battle for regulated liberty, and only in the consummation of these ends may we hope to realize that divine abstraction. In the concrete, this liberty has been a plant of slow growth and changeable fortune, now crushed by the iron heel of power, now blasted by the pestilence of faction, now running into rank luxuriance, and now crowned with fairest bloom and fruitage in the genial atmosphere of virtue and philosophy. It has been subject to manifold influences, deep or apparent, proximate or remote; and I shall deem it not inappropriate to this presence and occasion to glance briefly at that influence which the Christian Church has exercised upon its progress.

The fall of ancient Rome was followed by an almost total eclipse of ancient civilization. Society was long a rude chaos of conflicting elements, from which it required the influence of powerful agencies to educe order, harmony, and system. Laws were few and general, adapted only to the wants of nations destitute of the complicated arts of civilized life. At the same time, the spirit of the newly forming nations peculiarly fitted them for the influence of whatever was calculated to command awe, or enlist affection, and especially of what could meet that “mighty stream of tendency in the human mind” to grope after something tangible in reference to the future world. Christianity was now at

hand to proclaim its promises, to minister its consolations, to spread its light among the conquerors of decrepit Rome. To its agency, undoubtedly, must we ascribe the vast illumination of mankind that followed its diffusion, and, in short, most of the great phenomena of modern history. This beacon, lit upon the cliffs of time, was the guide and power that redeemed the race from its degradation, has been the well-spring of what of light and truth have flashed from the gloom of error, has been the inspiration of the patriot in striking the fetters from his countrymen, and of the philanthropist whose heart has throbbed responsive to the anguish of the oppressed, or exulted in their emancipation and improvement.

At an early period, the influence of the Church extended to the most minute concerns, and all the diversified relations, of the social body. It prescribed the duties of the citizen and subject, no less than it swayed the throned monarch, inculcating obedience in the one and tempering with mercy the counsels of the other.

Before their occupation of Southern Europe, the Goths had adopted the new faith, and exhibited its wholesome fruits as well in their morality as their laws and institutions. And it would be difficult to designate a more illustrious exemplar of wisdom and virtue than Theodoric, the Gothic monarch of Italy, whose wise laws and impartiality in their administration, whose devotion to the solid welfare and rational happiness of his subjects, place him in brilliant contrast with the imperial Cæsars. Nor was he alone; but Alaric in war, and Totila in peace, displayed the same results of Christian influence, in infusing a milder spirit of conquest and more enlightenment of civil polity.

Laws were early reduced to systems among modern nations, founded either upon their own usages or the borrowed laws of Rome, which soon became appreciated by the sovereigns of modern Europe. Now, the influence of the Church upon these ancient laws demands our scrutiny. However obscure the subject, yet a knowledge of some of the prominent facts of history, of the intrinsic scope and tendency of the new faith, and the visible results of some such great agency will avail to disclose something of the operation of that silent cause which wrought, not with the rush of battles, or the glaring circumstance of conquest, but with invisible, yet more than battle force. That the Church effected the abrogation of much that was at war with its spirit, and introduced much prolific of good into all the earlier systems of modern Europe can scarcely be questioned. Its traces are discernible as far as the history of the laws can be accurately pursued. In the old English law, for example, based upon custom, some rules of Mosaic law, among other features bear witness to the early

propagation of the faith to that island, then the Ultima Thule of the civilized world.

How *far*, especially upon the continent, early jurisprudence was indebted to the Church we are unable to define with any thing like certainty. The laws themselves every where indicated a free spirit, and could only belong to communities inspired with rational views of the relation between prince and people; they were adapted to afford security to person and property, and left little scope to judicial discretion.

Now, a great part of this is due to the influence of the Church upon the royal character. It mitigated the lust of power, it inspired with respect for the claims of the many, it prompted effort for their melioration, and induced express recognition and guaranty of their rights. We have already alluded to one example of a Christian king in the early history of modern society. Later, we find the illustrious, though not immaculate, Charlemagne, owing much of the Christian tone that marked his government to the fact that he, like Alfred of England, availed of the co-operation of his bishops in framing laws for his empire. And in those laws are the elements of the very institutions that have been approved as the surest guaranties of civil liberty. National Assemblies were established by him, and the people by deputy made a party to government. Thus, to the Estates of Nobles and Clergy were added that very Third Estate whose awakened thunder tones, in the eighteenth century, startled all of Europe's old despotisms, and aroused a spirit of free inquiry that is even now at work in the reformation of abuse, and in working out the elevation of the people. And when the Saxon heptarchy had been consolidated into one kingdom, the excellent Alfred, deeming it his highest glory to transmit a legacy of wise institutions, extracted from the mass of diverse laws and particular customs the elements of an uniform system, which secured the impartial administration of justice, and gave the sanction of *charter* to those rights exercised and enjoyed by a free and spirited people.

Now, in all this, who does not discern *concessions of monarchy and precedents of popular privilege*? If, then, I am asked why I thus dwell upon obsolete codes and the virtues of kings, whose names are but lingering memorials of faded greatness, I answer, because these ancient laws are the seeds of modern fruits, because they contain the germs of those great ideas of human rights, the development of which has been the struggle recorded by modern history—because they have never been a dead letter, but a living power. However antiquated, their influence upon modern constitutions brings them near to us, and makes us to recognize

in them a source of that very freedom which we now enjoy. They inspired the mass with ideas of their own, which have never been extinguished. Even under the iron bound system of feuds they were not forgotten, but the vassal had his defined rights, which he understood, however they were trampled upon by violence, or attempted to be obscured by usurpation. All the abuses attending the relation of lord and feudatory failed to extinguish a popular sense of right, and the idea of *privilege* was throughout sustained by one feature of the system—certainty in the services rendered by a portion of the vassals. Now, the ancient free institutions of a people are not likely to fade from their remembrance, but have ever kept fresh the *idea* of freedom as something tangible and worthy of attainment—a recollection which has nerved to heroic effort—sublime sacrifice—triumphant struggle. Happy the nation rich in recollections of a glorious past; whether glorious from the peaceful existence or the manly battle for free government! Thrice happy we, whose earliest national history is of blood bought liberty, and of institutions which will exert a potent influence “till the last syllable of recorded time.”

A most striking point in the importance of these ancient laws is that *their definiteness* has prevented modern revolution from proving utterly abortive. With nothing to remember and cling to as a tried and proved blessing, a people who have subverted a long established oppression are unable to check the impulse they have received, and, becoming the sport of stormy passions, are hurried headlong to strike hands with anarchy and pledge confusion, and thus one hydra head of despotism is destroyed only to make place for two. Such is the history of Turkish and other Eastern revolutions. Far different the story of England's vicissitudes. Notwithstanding the oppressive laws of William the Conqueror, the *ancient laws* of Edward the Confessor were ever remembered with affection, and were ever the rallying ground of the English in resisting every encroachment upon their liberties. They were thundered in the ears of the mailed Norman, and demanded with such emphasis by a people sensible of right and wrong, that kings quailed before them and sought conciliation by repeated concession. Magna Charta, wrested from King John by the Barons, with the countenance and sympathies of the people, was deemed a restoration of ancient privileges, and not a royal grant of new ones. And so are all other concessions extorted from English kings due to a spirit of liberty, fostered by recollections of rights and principles, consecrated by antiquity of origin, and indirectly ascribable to the influence of the Christian Church in developing those rights. Deriving our institutions from England, originally, we too are indebted to the same

remote source for those seed—principles which were wafted across the main on the wings of discovery, to expand in this more genial clime to nobler growth and fuller bloom.

Another view of the influence of the Church has respect partly to the circumstances which have surrounded its growth. Its history is originally of contest against pressure from without. In this conflict it arose, Antæus-like, with fresh vigor from every new prostration. Scarce was this work accomplished, when the serpent of strife and envies nestled in its very bosom. Yet, from this very circumstance, it is belived that results of not unmixed evil have been derived.

It is the opinion of a modern German philosopher, that in his primeval state of innocence and simplicity, the faculties of man preserved a happy balance and wrought in unison toward the same end; but that when discord once marred this halcyon scene of peace, not only did the race become divided into many nations, but the psychological structure of man become deranged, the faculties lost their harmonious play and attained different degrees of prominence. And, as in any production of individual intellect, either methodizing Reason, or beautifying Imagination, or profound Understanding, or the energetic Will, will manifest itself, so the intellectual character of nations in the ancient world developed respectively the same distinct characteristics. Thus, among the Chinese, predominated Reason, the faculty conversant with grammatical structure and systematic arrangement, or the over-refining mistress of systems and conceits in science and morals. In India, on the other hand, Imagination is discernible in the mysticism of her philosophy and the poetry of her mythology. Egypt again, the fountain head of the intellectual part of civilization, was distinguished by her profound Understanding and scientific depth. The energetic, ever active and undying Will characterized the chosen people of God. In point of pure intellect, they sustained no comparison with surrounding nations; but theirs was a moral pre-eminence, requiring the application of a different criterion of excellence and preparing them for an enlightenment far superior to the illumination of Paganism.

The intelligent Will, too, in higher development, is the faculty characteristic of Christianity. It is not hostile to intellectual progress and the triumphs of science, but it lifts its aspirations to loftier aims than lying philosophy and vain deceit: it treats death as the gate of life, and nerves to the endurance of torment and martyrdom, as transient pangs. Hence its chief features are, the impulse to *do* and the fortitude to *suffer*—the impulse to follow with undeviating resolution the persuasions of faith, the dictates of conscience, and the fortitude to bear any infliction of man's wrath, rather

than yield one letter of its creed, or swerve one jot or tittle from its formularies of duty.

However anomalous it appears at first blush, yet it is a striking truth, that in this Will—the fruit of faith in a religion of peace—is the very element of that *resistance* which has been the efficacious means of achieving human liberty.

A Domitian and a Nero, surrounded with all the insignia of absolutism, could not extort retraction from men to whom martyrdom was the price of perennial bliss, and eternal was the penalty of apostacy. Upon the fall of Paganism, however, the idea of *resistance* to absolute government was suspended; and to account for its revival is no trifling speculation, when we consider what sway despotic government achieved over the heart and head of mankind, and how deeply rooted was that persuasion of a divine right in kings, that arch folly and species of intellectual apotheosis which found open champions in England as late as the last of the Stuarts.

In the opinion of Guizot, the feudal system contributed principally to nurture this important idea of *resistance*. But it must be remembered that this was only fruitful in the insubordination of turbulent *barons*, and never produced concerted effort of the *people* against their oppressors. Besides, in France, where the power of the barons was greatest, this very circumstance is supposed by De Lolme to have led to the establishment of an absolute central monarchy which long repressed every element of opposition. It was not until the feudal system had in many places received its quietus, that we behold the phenomenon to be explained, springing from another origin—I mean, the agitation of religious opinion which led to the great Reformation of the sixteenth century. In speaking of sects, I shall not designate any one as distinctively Christian, nor shall I speak so much of their opposition to each other as to the temporal powers and appliances enlisted in behalf of religious creeds. I shall speak of the Reformation in no sectarian spirit, and not as the overthrow of religious error, but as the struggle of the *Christian religious principle* against the might of kings and princes, a struggle that revived the idea of resistance to absolute government, which seemed to have acquired a prescriptive legitimacy, a struggle, the commencement of the great battle for rational liberty, and the connected precursor of those triumphs over which millions of freemen now sing their pæans and shout their *eureka*!

The results of this great contest attest its magnitude. The kingdoms of the south where it did not rage, are comparatively imbecile. In the north, we behold, in some nations, the forms of free government, and where these are wanting, we yet see much of practical liberty.

The zeal of the Reformers awakened a corresponding opposition in sovereigns adhering to the Catholic faith, and the long struggle commenced which terminated, immediately, in religious—and, more remotely, in civil liberty. This contest broke the spell that had bound society in vassalage to kings; it stripped off the robe of sanctity that veiled the throne; and, with Ithuriel touch, exposed the royal pageant in its true light to once humiliated subjects; it showed sovereigns to be men of like passions and infirmities with themselves, and alike liable to errors of deepest import.

Now, the will to be free in matters of conscience is identical with the will to be free in matters of state; the energy of resistance inspired by religious faith is fit preparative to meet the encroachments of temporal tyranny. Men who had canvassed the pretensions of a priesthood and reasoned of their own spiritual destiny, were not likely to acquiesce in the assumptions of temporal tyranny. Men who inquired by what authority Popes deposed or created princes, were naturally led to investigate the titles of the latter. Men who taught that the community might select their own spiritual guides and frame their own creeds, were naturally led to inquire what were the people's rights in the body politic in reference to choice of rulers and constitutions. From the time when the faculties of law and theology in the University of Wittenberg declared that men were not bound to obey the Emperor in matters of faith, the claims of such potentates underwent continual discussion. Luther and the other reformers were the first men in modern Europe who fearlessly discussed the mutual obligations of prince and people, and proclaimed the rights of man and abuses of tyrants to an astonished world, to whom they appeared strange and startling truths. These events failed not to diffuse more rational political views, that eventually effected a radical reformation in the form or spirit of European government.

It must be observed that practical liberty *may* exist under any form of government, and that the excellence of republicanism consists simply in the safeguards with which it surrounds the important trust of public power. The institutions of Europe were not all radically *subverted* by the reformation, but received a modification in spirit or form which was impressed permanently.

The power of sovereigns adopting the reformation was actually strengthened by long co-operation of their subjects, but the very circumstances of the gain were ominous of retribution awaiting its abuse. These sovereigns acquired a stability resting upon new principles; they have subsequently made new professions to their subjects and have felt re-

strained from oppressing by a sense of what the people may do, should sufficient stimulus arouse them to concerted action. Unless her king prove faithless to his pledges, Prussia will be an example of practical liberty under the forms of monarchy. Her code of laws, celebrated as the finest of modern Europe, proclaims substantially those very *rights of man* which were heralded forth in France as new, in 1789. And it may be mentioned, as a feature of her jurisprudence, that the sovereign daily answers the suit of the private citizen in his own courts, a privilege denied the latter even in our country, to the disgrace of republican America.

The forms of free government also resulted where the reformation encountered the wrath of government.

The little city of Geneva was a spot on which the principles of reform had an early triumph. Expelling its Prince-bishop, it governed itself for nearly three centuries and supported protracted wars against enemies combining to enslave it. A geographical atom, it was the centre of an influence extending to the most powerful states of Europe. It cradled the religion of Henry IV, and the Protestant party of France, who, though crushed by the talents of Richelieu, taught a lesson of defiance to oppressors that was never lost on the French people. Here, too, the refugees of Queen Mary's reign found an asylum, and imbibed those principle of independence and republicanism which produced many of the known events of English history; hence, also, proceeded those sects of Presbyterians and Independents, whose agitations contributed to the revolution of 1640, and the overthrow of Charles I.

The emancipation of the Netherlands was another result of the spread of liberal opinions. Embracing reform, they attracted the vengeance of Philip II, whose armed legions and all the atrocity of Alva could not stifle opinion or subdue the stern resolve inspired by religious faith; and the Batavians formed a republic which long sustained a competition with the first powers of Europe.

In France, the persecutions endured by the Huguenots engendered a spirit of hostility which was propagated through successive generations, and undoubtedly had an effect in preparing the hearts of the people for their great revolution. However shocking the enormities which attended this event, he must be behind the age who does not recognise in it a great movement for the cause of human liberty that permanently affected surrounding nations, overthrew the cumbrous despotism of France, and elevated the people to a due appreciation of their rights; so that in 1830 the first signals of returning despotism, in the censorship of the press and other abuses, cost the rash Charles X his crown.

In England, the Roman Catholics had long suffered from legislation, which is the standing disgrace of a civilized age; but they were too few and feeble to offer effectual resistance. The Protestant Dissenters also had their share of persecution meted out to them. Charles I endeavored to establish Episcopacy in Scotland, and aroused a spirit of hostility which was inflamed by his usurpation of political power and flagrant outrages upon the constitutional rights of the subject, and only the ends of justice were accomplished by his overthrow. The same feelings, continued or revived, gave rise to the misfortunes of James II.

On the whole, at no period in English history were such advances made in the development of rational views in affairs of state; and ever since, the Commons have been the great power in government, and the sure bulwark of constitutional liberty.

Coeval with this dynasty was the growth of freedom in this Western World. The established Church of England lending its countenance to the doctrines of *prerogative*, the Dissenters naturally adhered to the most liberal views of popular rights. In politics, as in religion, they exhibited the zeal of reformers and a love of freedom which wrought with the power of faith. Such were the men whom persecution drove to lay, on this continent, the foundations of the fair fabric whose magnificence and simplicity challenge the admiration of mankind. Men so prepared as were these hardy pioneers, found every thing here favorable to the realization of that almost Utopian condition which had filled the bright dreams of philanthropy from the age of Plato. To the Roman Catholics of Maryland be given the praise of setting to the world the first brilliant example of universal toleration. But all the colonists were penetrated with a deep disgust for the antiquated forms of European despotism. They had come to a land where no proud tyrant's minion could invade their worship; where they erected the rude altar, and sent up the incense of morning prayer, and sang the vesper hymn, with the wild wood for a witness, and its roar to swell the solemn diapason. They had come to a land where political science was to be built up anew, and they resolved to lay its foundations deeply and broadly upon the everlasting rock of truth.

It were useless to pursue our country's history through all its trials and triumphs—we are free, and owe our freedom measurably to the mighty heavings of religious emotion. The principles of our progenitors germinated unto fruits of wisdom, until, in 1776, a new political revelation flashed upon a benighted world, a new star arose above the horizon, and nations flocked to worship the light of its rising. I know no

scene in profane history combining more of the elements of moral sublimity than that in which the Godlike sages of '76, gathered in council upon a moral Olympus, calmly surveyed the troubled scene below, and seeming to defy fortune and to tilt with fate, uttered their great fiat of Independence, and dared the struggle on the issues of which hung their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. And I know no man in profane history like him who was first among his revolutionary compeers, whose path was illumined by the chastened splendor of all the associated virtues, who stood before his country and his God unpolluted by any stain of vice.

“ And the elements

So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, this was a man.”

Illustrious Washington!

“ It is our pride,

An honest pride, and let it be our praise,
To offer to the passing stranger's gaze
His mansion and his sepulchre ; both plain
And venerably simple ; such as raise
A feeling more accordant with his name,
Than if a pyramid formed his monumental fame.”

Upon us, my countrymen, rests the grave responsibility of upholding in their purity the institutions transmitted to us, impressed with the wisdom of our forefathers. Let us not be beguiled with the illusions of military glory, nor allow aggressive wars to flood our country with demoralizing influences, and, it may be, smooth the path to central despotism. The Genius of Liberty, as she keeps her anxious vigils by the cradle of her young Columbia, is startled as she hears her nursling tossing in a troubled dream of bloodshed, rapine, and conquest!

Montesquieu not inaptly assigned virtue as the foundation of republics. In them every thing rests on the broad basis of public opinion, and whether this shall be the expression of radicalism and disorganizing licentiousness, or shall be sobered and enlightened by a pervading sense of moral and religious obligation, is the issue pregnant with weal or woe.

Without national virtue, an Athenian mob became the sport of demagogues and Macedonian bribes ; without this, a Roman populace fell at the feet of the Cæsars and exultingly surrendered the priceless boon of their liberty : without this, France forgot her first generous emotions and displayed the disgusting spectacle of mob supremacy ; without this, no free institutions ever did or ever will abide the tests of time and trial. And hence again the importance of Christianity is manifested, in its contribution to that national virtue essential to qualify a people for the enjoy-

ment of free government. Certainly nothing is so efficacious in developing the character of the upright citizen, in silencing the motives of selfishness, and in compacting men, with a chain of kindred sympathies, like heaven's over-arching bow spanning from horizon to horizon, as if to bind the nations in one brotherhood of love.

I have thus feebly endeavored to sketch some of the influences which the Christian church appears to me have exercised upon the progress of civil liberty.

Americans! yours is a trust to be administered to exalted objects. Did Napoleon amid the sands of Egypt inspire his troops with the declaration that centuries looked down upon them from the pyramids? Believe me, from every monument of the past, all ages look down upon you and your efforts in the great moral battle for the well being of universal man!

In these our humble schools are youth taught to consecrate to heaven the firstlings of the heart. Let them go forth panoplied in serene faith, to battle for truth and right, implacable foes of tyranny in the one and the many. Then shall the little fountain of good unsealed here, spread into streams, and these shall lift their exhalations which shall gather into clouds and sail away to drop their fertilizing showers upon distant fields.

Daughters of America! peerless among the fair of every clime, you are not cyphers in society, but yours is a part of infinite importance. However silent, yet is the influence of woman deep, sure, powerful, and abiding. There are those linked to you by the silken cords of affection—brothers, kindred, lovers, sons; animate them with the sentiments which should grace the citizen, the patriot, the man.

May heaven shed its holiest influences on the glorious cause of progress; that coming ages may realize the hopes and visions of patriotism, wherein she listens with prophetic hearing to the jubilee of freedom rising from ten thousand hills and plains and mountain sides, to be echoed among the rocky barriers of the west and flung back from their snowy scalps to mingle with ocean's chorus; and wherein she views with the eye of prophecy the increasing triumphs of those immutable principles of eternal justice which shall henceforth wield a growing power, till the purpose of man's earthly destiny is fulfilled, and *time* shall melt into *eternity*.

Williams

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